CHAPTER 9 『THE BEST FRIEND IN THE WORLD ②』

NOW IT'S MY TURN TO RESPOND TO THOSE FEELINGS!
YOUR FEELINGS REACHED US LOUD AND CLEAR.
DO YOUR BEST!
FIGHT, HOKUTO-SAN!
I'LL WIN
NO MAT-TER WHAT.
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Tsubame Girls Academy
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Suzume-gahara Middle School
WE NOW BEGIN
THE SECOND SINGLES MATCH.
LET'S HAVE A GOOD GAME.
LET'S HAVE A GOOD GAME!
※ RACKET EXCHANGE

BACK TO HER FACE!
I'LL BRING THAT SMILE
I'LL WIN...
AND PUT US BACK ON TRACK.
THAT'LL CANCEL OUT HANABI'S LOSS
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THERE'S NO WAY I'M LOSING TO YOU,
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POLKA-DOT PANTIES-SAN...!
WHA-?!
How did she know her panties pattern?
...?
Hakuto-chan hasn't changed at all.

SECOND MATCH, SINGLES 2
ITSUMO HOKUTO (SUZUMEGAHARA MIDDLE SCHOOL)
VS.
IROHANI IROXI (TSUBAME GIRLS' ACADEMY)
LOVE-ALL!
YES.
KUMAMI, YOU WERE IN SUZUMEGAHARA NOT TOO LONG AGO .. YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THIS GIRL, RIGHT?
HOKUTO-SAN'S MOST DANGEROUS WEAPON IS...
色道

HER SERVE.
色埴

ALRIGHT! SHE SCORED ON THE THIRD BALL ATTACK!
HOKUTO SURE KNOWS HOW TO CONTROL THE GAME WITH HER SERVES!
WITH HER SERVES?
THAT'S RIGHT
(HOKUTO) 1 - 0 (IKOKI)
BY PUTTING IN SOME EXTRA THOUGHT TO YOUR SERVE, YOU CAN RESTRICT THE TRAJECTORY OF YOUR OPPONENT'S RETURNS.
HOKUTO USED THAT TO WIN THIS POINT.
RESTRICT THE TRA-JECTORY?! HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE?!
YOU KNOW ABOUT HOW YOU CAN FORCE YOUR OPPONENT'S RECEIVE TO CURVE BY ADDING SIDE-SPIN TO THE BALL, RIGHT?
YOU SIMPLY TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THAT PROPERTY
LEFT-SPIN BALL
RIGHT-SPIN BALL
IF THEY HIT A LEFT-SPIN BALL WITH A STRAIGHT RACKET, IT'LL SWERVE TO THE LEFT.
IF THEY HIT A RIGHT SPIN BALL WITH A STRAIGHT RACKET, IT'LL SWERVE TO THE RIGHT.

※ THE SERVE IS THE FIRST BALL, THE OPPONENT'S RECEIVE IS THE SECOND, THE SERVER'S SECOND HIT IS THE THIRD, AND SO ON
FOR EXAMPLE, SUPPOSE YOU WERE THINKING "I WANT TO SCORE ON THE THIRD BALL WITH A FOREHAND SMASH."
YOU CAN ADD SOME LEFT-SPIN TO YOUR SERVE.
THAT WAY, THE RECEIVE WILL SWERVE TOWARDS YOUR FOREHAND SIDE,
AND YOU CAN RETURN THAT WITH A FOREHAND SMASH LIKE YOU WERE AIMING FOR!

IF YOU WANT TO TAKE THE OPPONENT BY SURPRISE OR GET A LONGER RECEIVE FROM THEM, YOU CAN DO A LONG SERVE!
ON THE OTHER HAND, IF YOU WANT THE BALL ON YOUR BACKHAND SIDE, YOU ADD RIGHT-SPIN TO YOUR SERVE.
IF YOU PLAN YOUR SERVES THAT WAY, YOU CAN KEEP THE MATCH UNDER YOUR CONTROL.
OOH...

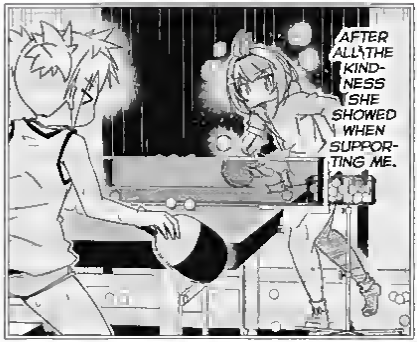
THE MOTIONS,
AIMING,
THE VARIOUS TYPES OF SPIN,
TRA-JECTORY CONTROL,
BY COMBINING MANY DIFFERENT ELEMENTS INTO YOUR SERVE, YOU CAN MAKE THEM VERY DIVERSE

THIS GIVES YOU AN ADVANTAGE OVER YOUR OPPONENT!
THAT'S RIGHT.
THAT'S HOKUTO'S TABLE TENNIS!

I'M NOT FAST LIKE HANAB!
MY SMASHES AREN'T POWERFUL LIKE PINK PANTIES'.
I CAN'T CHOP LIKE THE CAPTAIN OR DO A FAST-SPINNING DRIVE LIKE WHITE PANTIES.
AND MY CHEST IS NO MATCH FOR STRING PANTIES-SENPAI'S EITHER..
?!
THAT IS WHY
I FIGHT WITH MY SERVES!

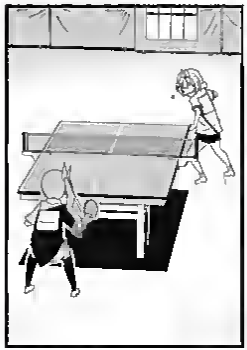
TABLE TENNIS CLUB
AND I OWE IT ALL TO HER.
THAT'S RIGHT.
IT'S FINE, I CAN DO IT BY MYSELF.
Uhyoo!!
HOKUTO! PRACTICING YOUR SERVES? LET ME HELP!
COULD YOU.. HELP ME OUT THEN?
OK
HOW ARE YOU GOING TO KNOW IF YOUR SERVES ARE ANY GOOD WITHOUT TRYING THEM OUT ON AN OPPONENT? LET'S PRACTICE TOGETHER!
THAT WON'T DO!
SO YOU BETTER BE PREPARED.
I'LL ALSO HELP YOU WITH YOUR PRACTICE
BUT,
YEAH, LEAVE IT TO ME! I'LL STICK WITH YOU ALL THE WAY!

COME ON, LET'S GET STARTED!
...
SURE!
I WORKED HARD ON MY SERVES EVERY SINGLE DAY WITH HER!!
HANABI...
SHE ALWAYS HELPED ME TO POLISH MY SKILLS.


AFTER ALL THE KIND-NESS SHE SHOWED WHEN SUPPOR-TING ME.

I CAN'T LOSE.

AFTER ALL THE BRAVERY SHE SHOWED FIGHTING FOR THE TEAM.



USING MY BEST SERVES!!
I'LL RESPOND TO HANABI'S FEELINGS
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(HOKUTO) 11 - 6 (IRORI)
SHE SECURED THE FIRST GAME!
SHE DID IT!
FIGHTING WITH SERVES, HUH?
I SEE WHAT YOU MEAN

IN THAT CASE
I'LL FIGHT IN THE RALLIES!
ZUKA
IROKI-SENPAI'S RIGHT KNEESOCK SLIPPED DOWN
AND IT FELL NEATLY INTO PLACE!
おお…
THAT MEANS SHE'S ABOUT TO GO ALL OUT!

LOLI-SENPAI'S SPECIAL TECHNIQUE...
HERE IT COMES!
ESTOC!

OH NO!
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(IRORI)
1 - 0
(HOKUTO)
WH -
WHAT A PRECISE
MIDDLE ATTACK!

IT'S THE WEAK POINT OF SHAKE-HAND PLAYERS
IN THE CASE OF RIGHT-HANDED PLAYERS,
IT WOULD BE THE AREA AROUND THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE CHEST.
EH?
MIDDLE ATTACK?
MIDDLE
FORE
BACK
DECIDING WHETHER YOU SHOULD USE YOUR FOREHAND OR YOUR BACKHAND CAN SLOW DOWN YOUR REACTION.
WHEN THE BALL COMES AROUND THIS REGION, YOU'RE FORCED INTO AN AWKARD STROKING POSTURE.
IT'S CALLED A MIDDLE ATTACK BECAUSE IT'S RIGHT AT THE CROSSOVER BETWEEN FOREHAND AND BACKHAND. RETURNING A BALL FROM THAT SPOT CAN BE DIFFICULT
SO YOU'RE PROBABLY NOT LOSING THE POINT THEN AND THERE
IT'S TRUE, THE BALL IS COMING STRAIGHT AT YOU,
BUT IT STILL FORCES YOU OUT OF A PROPER STANCE,
LEAVING YOU WIDE OPEN FOR THE OPPONENT TO SCORE ON THEIR NEXT SHOT.

BACK IN THE 14TH CENTURY,
IF YOU KEEP SHOOTING TO THE SIDES AND MIX IN AN OCCASIONAL MIDDLE ATTACK IT BECOMES EXTREMELY HARD TO DEFEND.
IN EUROPE, THERE WAS A SWORD THAT WAS USED TO PIERCE THROUGH THE GAPS ON A CHAINMAIL.
THE ESTOC.
SHE CALLS IT ESTOC BECAUSE IT "PIERCES THROUGH A GAP IN THE OPPONENT'S DEFENSE"...
IT'S REALLY JUST A NORMAL MIDDLE ATTACK BUT,

I'M JUST... S-SURPRISED BY LOLI-SENPAI'S CHILDISHNESS, THAT'S ALL.
HONESTLY... AS IF HER LOOKS WEREN'T ENOUGH, EVEN HER HEAD WORKS LIKE A KID'S
IT'S NOT EVEN THAT GOOD A METAPHOR.
NEMURI ISN'T VERY GOOD WITH TRORI'S ESTOC, RIGHT?
NEMURI, YOU'RE SHAKING.
SHE SPREADS HER SHOTS TO THE SIDES,
THEN MIXES IN A MIDDLE ATTACK,
AND SHE ALWAYS DOES IT
AT THE WORST POSSIBLE TIMING.

I DIDN'T EXPECT SUCH A NAUGHTY STRATEGY...
FROM SOMEONE WEARING SOMETHING AS CUTE AS POLKA DOTS.
SHE REALLY KNOWS HOW TO AIM HER SHOTS AT THE HARDEST PLACES
AND IT'S NOT JUST HER MIDDLE ATTACKS...
THERE'S NOTHING MORE I CAN DO.
ONCE SHE GETS ME INTO A PROLONGED RALLY...
I'M JUST LIKE YOU.
WHEN IT COMES TO RALLY TECHNIQUE, I AM SECOND TO NONE!
SO I DEDICATED MYSELF TO THIS SKILL!
I CAN'T COUNT ON MY SPEED, POWER OR SPIN...
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THAT'S NOT SOMETHING YOU CAN ACHIEVE OVERNIGHT.
SHE PRACTICES BASIC ROUTINES EVERY SINGLE DAY TO ACHIEVE THAT FINE LEVEL OF SKILL...
LOLI-SENPAI MAY LOOK LIKE A KID,
BUT SHE'S REALLY AMAZING.
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BRING IT ON!

SERVE TECHNIQUE VERSUS RALLY TECHNIQUE...
EACH OF THEM HAS PERFECTED A SINGLE SKILL...
NOW IT'S JUST A MATTER OF WHO CAN MAKE BETTER USE OF IT BEFORE THE GAME ENDS.
HUHU
IF YOU PUT IT LIKE THAT,
I'D SAY IRORI-SAN HAS ALREADY WON THIS MATCH.
...!

I WON'T LOSE!
AS LONG AS SHE CAN'T DEAL WITH MY SERVES...
SERVES ARE STILL MY TERRITORY
NO MATTER HOW GOOD SHE IS AT RALLIES,
THEN GO FOR A POWERFUL EARLY RETURN!
I'LL USE A RIGHT SPIN SERVE TO LURE HER INTO SHOOTING AT MY BACK-HAND SIDE
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I CAN'T DO A STRONG SHOT LIKE THIS...
AND WHAT A LOW RECEIVE!
FORE-HAND SIDE?

OH NO...
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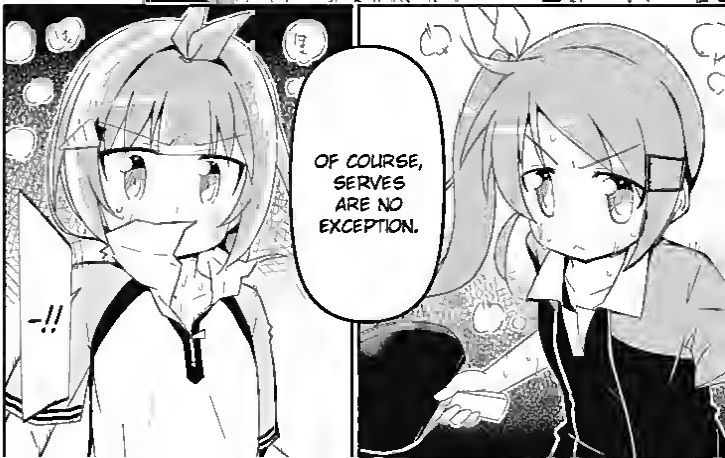
HER SERVE DIDN'T WORK?
HOKUTO-SAN COULDN'T SCORE ON THE THIRD BALL ATTACK.

(HOKUTO)
5 - 6
(IRORI)

BEING GOOD AT RALLYING MEANS BEING ABLE TO COUNTER ALL SORTS OF DIFFERENT STROKES.
IT'S QUITE SIMPLE.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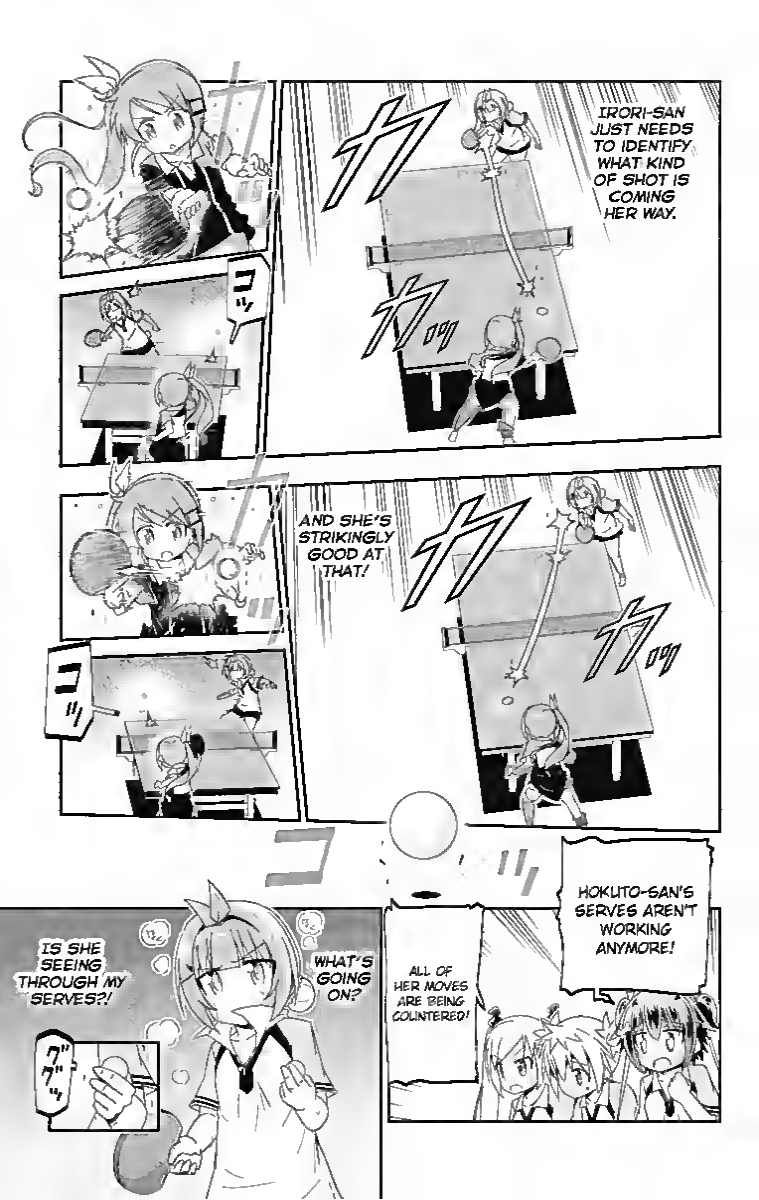
OF COURSE, SERVES ARE NO EXCEPTION.


IRORI-SAN JUST NEEDS TO IDENTIFY WHAT KIND OF SHOT IS COMING HER WAY.
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AND SHE'S STRIKINGLY GOOD AT THAT!
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HOKUTO-SAN'S SERVES AREN'T WORKING ANYMORE!
ALL OF HER MOVES ARE BEING COUNTERED!
IS SHE SEEING THROUGH MY SERVES?!
WHAT'S GOING ON?
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THAT CAN'T BE!
NO!

THIS IS POINT-LESS.
YOUR SERVES HAVE A FATAL FLAW TO THEM, YOU KNOW?
THEIR SPIN IS TOO WEAK.
YOU CAN TRY AS MANY DIFFERENT KINDS OF SERVES AS YOU WANT, IT'S NOT GOING TO DO YOU ANY GOOD LIKE THIS!
ONLY TO A CERTAIN DEGREE...
I THOUGHT SHE COULD CONTROL THE OPPONENT'S RECEIVE!
-!!
YOU CAN COUNTER THE SPIN'S EFFECT BY PUTTING THE OPPOSITE SPIN ON THE BALL TO CANCEL IT OUT OR BY HITTING IT ON THE SPINNING AXIS.
IF THEY DO THAT, HOKUTO CAN'T KNOW AHEAD OF TIME WHERE THE NEXT BALL IS GOING TO GO TO...
Hit the ball at an angle to add reverse spin.
Hit the ball near the axis to minimize the spin's effect.

BUT HOKUTO'S SERVES AREN'T WEAK AT ALL!
"?" "?"
THEY'RE NOT WORKING BECAUSE...
WELL, TO BE HONEST... HER OPPONENT IS SIMPLY BETTER...
YOU DID CAUSE ME A BIT OF TROUBLE AT FIRST, BUT
NOW THAT I'M USED TO YOUR GAME, THIS ISN'T MUCH OF A CHALLENGE
YOUR HALF-ASSED SERVES
WON'T WORK ON ME ANY-MORE!

THIS IS BAD
HOKUTO ISN'T VERY GOOD AT SCORING WHEN SHE CAN'T GRAB THE INITIATIVE WITH HER SERVE.
AND TO MAKE THINGS WORSE, ONCE THE GAME ENTERS A PROLONGED RALLY,
THAT'S THE BEST DEVELOPMENT POSSIBLE FOR IROHANI-SAN AND HER ESTOC.

MY SERVES...
AREN'T WORKING.
DOES THAT MEAN...
MY PRACTICE WITH HANABI...
WAS FOR NOTHING?
ALL OF THOSE DAYS
TRAINING TOGETHER...

TRY AS MUCH AS YOU'D LIKE,
I'LL JUST KEEP RETURNING YOUR PUNY SERVES
I WON'T STOP
UNTIL I BRING YOU DOWN!!
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SULKING WANKO